

# Urban and Regional Planning in a Federal State"

THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

Edited by

**William T. Perks and Ira M. Robinson**

The University of Calgary

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## The Politics of Urban Populism: A Decade of Reform

Lloyd Axworthy

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**Foreword by**

**Hans Blumenfeld**

## URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING IN A FEDERAL STATE

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# Foreword

Canada is a creation of planning. Pigheaded, venturesome people, first in Paris, then in London, and finally in Ottawa created this east-west strip of sovereign territory and its built environments. They were capitalist entrepreneurial planners, not capitalist or communitarian utopians. Their plans more often than not came to fruition but in total disregard of both the environmental determinism of geography and any participation by the citizens already settled there. To them are owed the layouts and impressive feats of construction for the waterways, railways, roads, harbors, and pipelines that shaped the Canadian economic and physical environments during the 18th and 19th centuries.

There were no "grown" towns; in all of their essential features, Canadian cities are planned "new" towns. The planners did, however, retain for the crown a grid of rights-of-way for streets and a few parcels for other public purposes before dividing the balance of the land into rectangles for speedy sale. Once the rectangles were sold, it remained the owner's business to decide what to plant or build, cut down or demolish on the property.

In that period of birth and adolescence, Canadian

development paralleled and emulated the development processes south of the border. Also parallel was the growth of interest in conscious management of the environment exemplified by such theorists and practitioners as Olmstead, MacKaye, the authors of the New York Regional Plan, and the fathers of TVA. In Canada the new interest is identifiable with the missionary work of Thomas Adams, Frederick Osborn, and the Commission on Conservation. This promising conjunction of the city planning and conservation movements was unique to Canada, but it did not last. Only in very recent years has it again come to life, as evidenced by several of the contributions to this book on Canadian planning.

During the 1920s, developments in our planning thought and practice closely followed those in the United States, but they ceased almost completely with the arrival of the depression. Only after the conclusion of World War II was a new start made. Once again the impetus—and much of the human resources for the job—came from England, this time through the example of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and the importation of a score of British planners at the initiative of Humphrey

Carver and his associates at the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

In the following decades, U.S. influences became predominant, not only because of the proximity of example and educational institutions but also because Canada is so unlike the tight little island across the sea. In its size, newness, and growth, its industrial structure and social ethic, Canada was much more akin to the United States. Yet it still shares with the mother country the willing acceptance of government action and public enterprise. In the Canadian scheme of things, the crown rules by the grace of God; government in Canada is not evil. Forms of government intervention and public planning therefore constitute a welcome and illuminating aspect of most essays in this book.

Out of the conflicts and combination of these two main influences—British and American—have developed some uniquely Canadian approaches to planning. The following chapters present an informative and, in many important respects, a first look at the current state of the art. In a large number of papers selected and assembled for their diversity and particular meaning for Canadian planning, planners and related professionals discuss their work. Many deal with case studies, possibly the most

informative of vehicles for the learning practitioner and by any standard, a valuable source for students.

These twenty essays deal with the themes that concern planners everywhere: the growth of large cities in vast metropolitan regions and the lack of growth in the nonmetropolitan regions left behind; the need for man to stop raping nature; the changes in ownership, control and management of lands and in government structures conducive to effective planning; and the attempts to enable citizens to govern the persons whom they have elected or appointed.

The totality of this book is more than the sum of its parts. For the first time practitioners and students of planning and the growing number of Canadians concerned with the changes in the environment of their vast country occurring under the impact of rapid urbanization are presented with a comprehensive picture of that unique development and of the specific Canadian attempts to cope with it. It is a testimony to the fact that in this field, as in others, Canada is coming of age.

Hans Blumenfeld  
*University of Toronto*



# Series Editor's Foreword

The Community Development Series aims to facilitate the exchange of information and expert advice among professionals who are shaping the physical environment. Written by fellow practitioners, CDS offers planners, architects, landscape architects, interior designers, engineers, and others authoritative knowledge in convenient book form.

Some CDS books are reference manuals that describe specific ways to solve problems encountered in everyday practice. Other books, broader in scope, will help keep professionals abreast of shifting concepts, values, methodologies and conceptual solutions—important ideas in a world where change itself seems to be the only constant. From time to time an ever-broader perspective will be presented by state-of-the-art books that embrace large issues or significant planning territories. The latter task is what Professors Perks and Robinson have accomplished in *Urban and Regional Planning In a Federal State: The Canadian Experience*.

Their work is welcomed on several grounds. The authors and their collaborators present carefully selected materials and evaluations that are current, informed, and stimulating. One gets a full range of causes and effects from regional planning to local planning in Canada, a nation filled with stresses and strifes being resolved with-

in the framework of a parliamentary democracy of the federal type. Further, many of the processes and products of Canadian planning and design are of themselves important enough to spend time discovering, evaluating, and perhaps even adopting elsewhere. So here they are in full abundance for that purpose too.

One other aspect of the Perks/Robinson book deserves mention; its restorative powers should not be overlooked. Like cold buttermilk on a hot summer day, this book on Canadian planning refreshes. Reanimating planners as well as planning is no easy task. Those concerned and involved in planning are occasionally worn away by late night meetings, writing weekend reports, fatigued by the requisites of involving all parties, and sometimes stunned by slow moving bureaucracies, politically vulnerable no matter how logical and rational the planning. The Canadian experiences have not been free of these conditions of *doing* planning. But what also comes through in this pragmatic book is that good planning does make a difference and that documented insight alone makes a substantial contribution to improving the built environment.

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# The Politics of Urban Populism: A Decade of Reform

Lloyd Axworthy  
*The University of Winnipeg*

## THE STAGE FOR URBAN REFORM

Until the mid-1960s local governments performed with a minimum of political controversy. Politicians prided themselves on keeping politics out of city government and carried out their tasks with the solemn mien of a bank director or the harmless flamboyance of a carnival barker. Planners produced master plans while their political masters adopted them without concern for the social implications of planning. The pallid cast of city politics in Canada was aptly reflected in academic treatments of the subject. Scholarship mainly consisted of detailed examinations of administrative or structural minutiae. And even these writings were often tinged with presbyterian invocations to principles of good government.

The tumultuous 1960s brought an awakening that forced urban politics into the open and to become more sensitive to the public. In 1967, the Annual Economic Council Report (1967) documented what many others had already sensed: urban growth ill-

managed; a shortage of housing; city finances in a mess; transportation in chaos; and governments at all levels with few answers. From the United States came the heady whiff of civil-rights marches, student demonstrations, advocacy planning, community control, and a challenging set of propositions about participatory democracy. Many Canadians started to think about the stiff, hierarchical form of their own institutions. The federal government (with mixed motives) unleashed disruptive elements in the urban scene as it gave life to a small band of community organizers in the Company of Young Canadians (CYC) and supported new community organizations through Opportunities for Youth (OFY) and Local Incentive Programme (LIP). It also short-circuited the traditional housing and urban development approaches of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) when it let loose Mr. Hellyer and his Task Force on Housing. The "quiet revolution" in Quebec (1960-1965) not only stirred the imagination but gave renewed hope and vigor to sociopolitical reformers.



A different set of individuals and interest groups now entered the local political arena to challenge the veterans. New bands of citizens began vying for a role in planning *their* neighborhoods. Reformers gained seats on city councils, while the mass media and some academics began to analyze the practices and policies of cities critically. While all of these developments did not necessarily stem from the same cause or were a cohesive, planned movement of urban reform, they do add up to distinguishable patterns of change. There were common assumptions about the elite nature of urban decision making, with ambitions of democratizing the system and changing the equation of who gained the benefits and who paid the costs of government action. In many ways, the changes resembled the earlier populist movement in Canadian cities a half-century before (Rutherford, 1974). There was then a similar surge of reform energy that altered the pattern of politics and structures in our cities, creating the fundamental structures of the political system against which present reforms now contend.

From the experience of the last decade several lessons may be learned. In this chapter a "late stage" prognosis is presented: an analysis of what transpired and a glimpse of what life may be left in the urban reform spirit. The focus will be on what kinds of reform were attempted during the period, what each was able to achieve, and what political situation now exists as a consequence of reform efforts.

## THE VARIOUS ROADS TO URBAN REFORM

Depending upon one's initial view of what ails the city, or where one stood in the political spectrum, or whether one was a bureaucrat, politician, or activist, one advocated a different strategy of reform. For example, for those trained in the political science departments of Queens University, or Toronto and Western Ontario, circa 1930 to 1960, the problem was obsolete government structures. The solution was to rearrange the machinery of urbanism, generally in a regional, integrative way. On the other hand, if one

subscribed to the power-elite version of public affairs, like James Lorimer and his disciples, all evil resided in the forces of the property industry. What would save the system was socialism or replacing private oligopoly with public monopoly. While there may have been some differences in proposed solutions, there were some unifying themes and a related set of approaches to urban reform that emerged at a comparable time in the mid-1960s.

To begin with, there was general agreement on the conditions affecting Canadian cities and the inadequacies of the conventional approaches taken by governments. Cities were growing at an unprecedented rate, accompanied by shortages and escalating costs in housing, land, and services; sprawl at the periphery and large-scale developments at the core; transportation geared to automobiles and mass transit ignored. These and other difficulties in the management of growth came as some surprise to Canadians but not as much as the realization of just how incorrect or inadequate prevailing government responses were. At a 1967 federal-provincial housing conference, the premiers left a day early in disgust when they discovered how bankrupt federal policies were in offering solutions to the escalating housing crisis. Urban renewal, heralded as urban renaissance in the 1950s by planners and CMHC officials, was now seen as an expensive and socially draconian program. Public housing projects were criticized as sterile and unsuitable for families. City governments were repeatedly seen as having neither the will nor the means to address problems of public planning or private development, and their ineptness gave rise to declared dissatisfaction on the part of residents in urban neighborhoods who bore the brunt of higher densities, community deterioration, and more car traffic. The venerable institutions of representative government also came under attack. Academic research played its part here as a new breed and expanding class of behavioral and political scientists probed the formal structures of government to discover the weighty influence of economic power, social class, or bureaucratic control in decision making.



Although many Canadians came to share with their American neighbors a healthy skepticism about our form of "democratically led" government, the mood was not one of complete negativism. Along with the skepticism went an (essentially American) idealistic theory of participatory democracy. First enunciated by student radicals and in part legitimated in the community action program of the American War on Poverty, there emerged a set of propositions about how people—especially the disadvantaged—should be given the right to decide for themselves on programs that affected them. It was not enough to elect someone; people must become directly involved in planning, deciding, and implementing for their own welfare and not rely upon elected surrogates or appointed bureaucrats.<sup>2</sup>

In Canada this idea of direct involvement was picked up and given first expression in the organizing effort of the CYC whose youthful participants mobilized challenges to local government. Then the Hellyer task force on housing and urban development, referred to earlier, reached beyond the conventional network of professional experts and traditional interest groups to consult directly with the people on the doorsteps and in the church basements of urban renewal areas and public housing projects. The report of the task force (1969) was profoundly influenced by this grass-roots contact, and it made a frontal attack on a number of existing policies. When the federal government decided to perk up employment through community-initiated projects under LIP and OFY, it provided financial incentives for some Canadians to undertake innovative projects.

The populist philosophy of "power to the people" became allied with public concern over environment protection and neighborhood preservation. Growth during the 1950s and early 1960s had been seen as a virtue. Mayors, premiers, and prime ministers cited with pride statistics on population increase, new industries attracted, and new developments underway. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, growth could be seen as a mixed blessing. Increased awareness and renewed respect for what was old, graceful, cherished, and uncluttered emerged. These concerns, primarily

expressed by middle-class urban residents, found an easy marriage with the yearning for effective participation. Against the political groups that held power in city hall, provincial capitals, and in Ottawa, who held to notions of growth, property development, the efficiency of bigness, and the sanctity of parliamentary government, there emerged a countermovement opposed to unreasoned, unplanned growth, preference for smallness over bigness, opposition to the notion that public works were necessarily good works. This movement wanted a change in the way decisions were made. As inchoate as it sometimes seemed, the theology of urban populism had clearly emerged.

## THE THEOLOGY OF URBAN REFORM

A new theology attracts practitioners who may follow differing gospels. As the decade of urban populism progressed, four areas of "devotion" could be discerned.

### The Gospel of Government Reform

The period witnessed a number of efforts to restructure government institutions. This was, in part, a result of the lingering influence of earlier reform-good government theories taught by generations of government and public administration faculties in Canada. If one could change the structure, one could produce reform. So went the lesson in many political science classrooms. The most pronounced reform of this kind was seen in new regional and metropolitan governments. Nova Scotia established a Royal Commission on Local Government; New Brunswick undertook a wholesale reorganization of its local government structure; Quebec's Blier Commission established the Montreal Urban Community (MUC); Ontario set up several new regional governments; Manitoba initiated Unicity in Winnipeg; British Columbia had the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD).

These structural reforms were intended to overcome the seeming weakness of local government multiplicity.



or fragmentation, the attendant problems of fiscal and economic disparities, and hodge-podge planning. More accurately they reflected a fairly conventional notion that what caused city problems was a malfunctioning in government machinery, which could be repaired by new designs. It was a solution attractive to provincial officials who were less inclined to face the more intractable problems of social and economic disruptions. Although this approach was inadequate and partial, one should not discount the efficacy of government reorganization as a means to promote a different style of urban politics. Institutions and their structures do shape the flow of urban politics, and they can alter the advantages of certain groups vying for political power. The change in ward boundaries in Toronto, for example, made it simpler for councillors representing a distinct neighborhood point of view to gain election.

The reorganizations themselves showed the effects of a new populist mood. In the Winnipeg reorganization, provision was made for resident advisory groups (RAG) that were to be created in each of the community committee areas as a means of establishing closer contact between citizens and decision makers. It also included legal provisions for environmental impact statements at the city level.<sup>3</sup> In Vancouver and in Ottawa, the GVRD and the RMOC undertook large-scale planning efforts on regional priorities that included public hearings and citizen consultations. There was some recognition that policy making had to include closer, more accessible means of contact and consultation within the new frameworks of government.

To a lesser degree, this orientation was also taken in provincial and federal governments. A number of advisory boards involving private citizens were established. An impact was made through federal funding of community organizations, which in turn would use the money to lobby against government programs and policies. The CMHC also caught the flavor of the times. Its support of a community-run renewal program in the Strathcona area of Vancouver is perhaps the most successful example of its tangible support for community organization. Amendments to the National

Housing Act ostensibly recognized new priorities for involvement by requiring citizen participation in NIP programs and offering more generous aid to nonprofit housing groups.

Although there was some recognition of citizen involvement in the area of government reform, the major outcome of action on provincial and federal levels of government was to strengthen and revamp their own regulatory and policy machinery. Provincial governments established new provincial housing corporations or expanded the mandates of existing ones by extending their functions into planning-policy-research activities, land assembly, new communities, transit, airports, and so forth. The federal government reorganized and expanded CMHC. In 1968 it set up the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA) with an initial role to establish liaison with other levels of government and to undertake a good deal of heavy academic research. Under the new ministry came a trilevel process of consultation between governments on urban matters, which led to a series of generally closed sessions of government officials deliberating on pressing city matters. In general, while a good deal of lip-service was given to the right of citizens to be involved, the overall and most significant effect of government action in this period was to expand and enhance the role of public bureaucracies.

Some public officials did support citizen groups. The CYC was allowed to engage in organizing (until 1976). Some native groups, consumer associations, and environmental groups were given funds to lobby. Public hearings on planning matters became widely used. Planning reports were required by law to be made public and accessible under some of the new provincial planning acts. Environmental impact statements and freedom of information proposals prompted much debate and discussion. These were all progressive steps toward opening the decision-making systems.

Against these achievements have to be measured equally strong movements toward increased bureaucratization, absence of administrative accountability, and top-down decision making. Although there were more advisory boards and public hearings, the record



of real influence is not outstanding.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, structural changes encompassing citizen involvement too often met with hostility from civil servants and politicians. In Winnipeg, for example, the innovative RAG structure has now atrophied for lack of provincial or city support; the environmental impact requirements were ignored; and the city fathers established an administrative district system that had no correspondence with, or accountability to, the community committee areas where supervision by elected representatives and resident advisers was supposed to occur. In summary, structural reforms proved only as good as the political process that worked within the local area, and if there was too little base for reform support, few reforms took place.

### The Gospel of Community Power

Urban populists placed little faith in the idea of change through structural reform. That was an activity for old-line reformers. A much more important idea, borrowed essentially from the American experience, was community power. The central tenet of community power is that people should have direct participation in making decisions that affect them and their community. This could be achieved through the establishment of comprehensive, all-purpose neighborhood governments chosen from the community (Kotler, 1969); on a more limited scale, through control over specific institutions such as schools; or through local programs for housing renewal, health, and so forth (Aleshire, 1974).

Under the U.S. Community Action Program groups of disadvantaged blacks and other poor people took over many traditional functions of local government and, through Community Development Corporations, managed their own renewal activities. There was a good deal of criticism of this approach and a number of reported failures (Burton and Garn, 1969), but the idea of community control—community power did spawn a wide variety of self-help housing, renewal, health, and localized economic development.<sup>5</sup> Even when

the Nixon and Ford administrations withdrew federal funding, real achievements continued to be seen.

Canadians quickly borrowed community control and many of the techniques of organizing. One major difference is that resource support for such things as community corporations and action programs were never part of official federal programs as they were in the United States, although Canadian authorities inadvertently gave impetus to the movement. For example, the CYC was one of the early agencies to take up the idea of community power and implant it among local groups they organized in cities throughout Canada (Fraser, 1972).

Another early, somewhat successful, example was the Strathcona Property Owner and Tenant Association in East Vancouver. Its efforts began as a protest against a public housing project to be located in the predominantly Chinese community. It gained the ear of federal housing officials and the minister and received over \$2 million to manage a program of rehabilitation and renewal. The association is still active, undertaking housing and recreational programs.

One of the most ambitious efforts at developing a broad-based community organization was the Riverdale Community Organization in Toronto, sparked by Alinsky-trained Don Keating. From 1970 to 1972, the umbrella group and affiliated organizations were active in confronting city officials and businessmen on a number of issues. Their purpose was not only discussion but the creation of a full-scale community organization to ensure that local residents became the prime decision makers in their community. Riverdale was perhaps the most notable effort to establish community control. Eventually it floundered through a combination of erratic funding, opposition from politicians and officials, and internal disputes, but it remains a dramatic example of how to build a system of community-based decision making in clear contrast to the conventional system of representative democracy.<sup>6</sup>

In almost every Canadian city similar groups took responsibility for planning and development. There are now a number of nonprofit housing groups. The native people have over nine nonprofit housing corporations



working in urban areas. There are community-run health centers, day care centers, and employment and retraining programs, all fulfilling tasks previously performed by government officials and in general, supported by public funds. The rationale for community self-help goes back to basic precepts, perhaps best articulated by the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia: it is better to enable people to help themselves than to provide the help. Those who take a role in planning their own community have a stake in what goes on; the process of self-help is just as important as the service or product being delivered.<sup>7</sup>

As important as this concept is and as useful as have been the numerous efforts in community action, performance has fallen short of expectations. Certainly the idea of groups of citizens becoming the preeminent decision makers in their community has never been realized in Canada. In cases of self-help activity, there is too often an accompanying tale of frustration—in coping with the need to secure government funding, in working through a maze of rules and regulations, and in struggling with opposition from public officials, politicians, and quite often the media. Community self-help organizations have not yet been widely accepted as a vital ingredient in creating a more democratic system. As a result, they live a precarious existence. They still confront a deeply embedded notion that decisions are made by politicians and officials, not people. Their funding is capricious and niggardly, which suggests the need for legislative guarantees and clearly earmarked sources of funds.

Nonetheless, the limited achievements of the community self-help sector has had an impact on the urban political process. In many instances they have offered modes of urban development and delivery of services that are distinct alternatives to traditional, government-directed programs, and in so doing, they have provided groups of low-income people the chance to stand on their own feet and take responsibility in and for their communities. This often placed a brake on the unilateral decisions of city officials or private entrepreneurial forces, and it has caused new considerations to be raised in local planning. Out of the experience have

arisen new political leadership and new political pressure groups. The very act of organizing to become involved in neighborhood planning or a housing project imparts skills, confidence, and sense of purpose. In the early days of community organizing, the political champion was an outsider, often a middle-class professional or organizer who worked with the group; now the political foot soldiers from lower-income areas are learning the tricks of the trade.

### **The Gospel of Community Protest and Politics**

Perhaps the most visible feature of urban change over the last decade has been the drama of protest: urban reform politics. The heroic populist mayors that appeared in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto, the new urban reform groups capturing seats on councils, the innumerable marches on city hall to stop a bridge or an expressway—all these have formed significantly new facets of the urban political scene. The emergence of those new political actors has a much wider base, however, than that of the community self-help groups. There is also a larger constituency of protest committees and rate payer groups, environmental organizations, and civic good government groups. Often their coming together reflects a specific policy conflict or issue—an expressway, a downtown development project, a railway relocation scheme. The underlying commitment is against growth, against gargantuan projects, against bureaucracy, and for small-scale things like conservation and preservation of older neighborhoods. It stems from some new political realities in our cities.

There are now more people occupying high-density areas: the young unmarried, the older single people. While still middle class, they are becoming radicalized to a degree. The growing base of urban voters who, because of age, location, and self-interest are now prepared to support reform politics, is a critical factor too often overlooked in the interpretations of political change in Canadian cities. As demographic studies show, extensive areas of the inner city are now populated by



young people under thirty and old people above fifty. They are tenants and relatively sophisticated politically. The young are not tied to the same property and economic interests as their parents; the older "empty nesters" now find that being subject to the whim of a landlord is different from being a property owner. These are the people who do not want highways built through their neighborhoods and want to preserve neighborhood amenity and identity. When matched up with disaffected lower-income people, they present a potential base for political reform that needs only mobilizing.

In some cities they have been mobilized. Toronto provides a well-known example of how people in the inner city became conscious of city matters, with a variety of groups springing up to oppose downtown development, freeways, and massive renewal projects. From this base in the 1960s, a few councillors with a strong radical-reform basis were elected, and in 1972 a mayor and the majority of the council were elected on the promise they would slow development and apply different standards of measurement to policies and programs. To a lesser degree, the TEAM group in Vancouver gained control, and in Montreal a burgeoning reform group now challenges the imperial mayor, Jean Drapeau.

One can now find across Canada elected members of all political stripes who espouse urban populist arguments and try to live by them. They oppose growth for its own sake; they propose that inner-city areas be developed or managed in economic and socially beneficial ways, not just through physical reconstruction. They question public giveaways to the developers and suggest ways of making government more accessible and accountable. Their accomplishments are quite tangible. Toronto and Vancouver have established nonprofit housing corporations to supply low-income accommodation in ways generally compatible with neighborhood needs. They are better regulating development in downtown areas through downzoning and tough plans. And there are efforts to control speculative land dealings on the fringe and undertake more effective land-use policies.

But it would be wrong to herald this movement as an irreversible tide. In many cities the reformers are nonexistent or constitute a small minority. Toronto is generally the exception to the rule, and in many places like Winnipeg, Regina, Halifax, and Edmonton, the political system is still dominated by old-time political action and old-timers' perspective on the urban environment. Furthermore, reforming zeal appears to be on the wane. Crusading is a tough business; as the original excitement of first engagements wears off, it turns to a succession of small, wearing battles. City councillors are generally not sustained within any coherent party system, so reform battles are often fought alone or in tiresomely shifting sets of coalitions. Reformers' pay is not very good, which leads eventually to disillusionment. Thus the full development and growth of an urban reform style of politics is currently in question. Finally, the real question about the gospel of protest politics is, What difference does it make? There may be changes in the substance of some programs and policies, but the fundamental issue raised in the earlier years of urban populism (who is to have power and who is to make decisions) remains unresolved; to date, the record of successes by reform politicians in this respect is not very good.

### **The Gospel of Community Communication**

Communication is a critical tool of modern-day politics. The media influence is well understood, as is the power of the written word. The early civil-rights activists knew they could multiply their power a thousandfold by ensuring that a television cameraman was invited to the local demonstration, and community activists have long utilized the mimeograph machine (and in some cases the videotape recorder) as their own form of equalizer with the bureaucracies downtown. The emergence of a communication network to carry the reform message, and the emergence of a coterie of academics, journalists, and pamphleteers who supplied the message, are two major characteristics of the



reform decade and ones that may in the long run have the most pervasive influence.

Until the mid-1960s, communications on urban issues in Canada had all the meaning and relevance of a report to shareholders. There was some turgid treatment of local government in the academic journals and some whimsical treatises on English-style planning in the professional journals. Applied research was then limited, very much dominated by the beaux arts philosophy of CMHC advisory groups who paid for most of it. There was virtually no treatment in magazines, radio, or television, and the daily press invariably reflected a chamber of commerce, new development, boosterism philosophy. The first break in this pattern came with the Economic Council report of 1967 (Economic Council, 1967), which contained a chapter detailing the facts of urbanization in Canada and spelling out actual and potential woes. It provided first-hand, factual information to buttress the intuitive sense of unease about Canadian urbanism felt by a few in the planning and academic professions, and it gave ammunition for the first serious opposition attack on government housing policy in the House of Commons.

The late 1960s was a time when government documents began to play a more important role in opening up options and shaping opinion. A few examples have to suffice. The Hellyer task force report sharply attacked many conventional urban programs, such as renewal and large-scale public housing; it called for self-renewal, ownership of homes, and a kind of neo-capitalism approach to helping the needy obtain shelter. It generated fierce debate on the issues and the options. The Urban Canada series of papers, edited by Harvey Lithwick during his tenure as research director and adviser at MSUA, provided a valuable, new set of information and the beginnings of more structured thought on Canada's urban system and on its urban problems. Dennis and Fish published a major study of housing and development policies in Canada (Dennis and Fish, 1972), which became a new bible of a progressive social gospel for planners, activists, and policy analysts. In Quebec, the Belanger commission on taxation and the LaHaye report (1968) on municipal

planning set the stage for reforms, as well as popular understanding of the financial and philosophical issues in urbanism.

Equally important as the documents themselves was the fact that their production had required that Canada mobilize many able minds. The greater infusion of public funds into urban research in this period helped create a number of new and often innovative post-graduate courses in the urban field, and these in turn spawned a new generation of thinkers and doers. Many of the current authors in urbanism received their initiation as part of one federal study team or another or in the short-lived, counterbureaucracies of Ottawa and Quebec City in the 1960s. As this was happening, the effects of community action, renewal, and protest politics were generating a new coterie of commentators, information hawks, interpreters, and recorders. To fight Spadina in Toronto there had to be research on urban transit; to fight for Nosehill in Calgary, one had to examine the property industry; and so on. There emerged a number of community organizers, university research institutes, and public interest groups who could communicate their experience, and their works began to appear in the smaller journals, magazines, and freshly new polemical publications like *City Magazine*.

In the next step, media picked up the urban populist frame of reference and used it to examine city affairs. Newspapers began to probe city hall and expose deals and duplicities; articles began to record the actions of local neighborhood groups and protest organizations. The same spirit emerged in classrooms of the universities, community colleges, and some planning schools. Curricula included discussion of advocacy planning, participation, local government reform, environment, and institutions. In a short period have been produced planners, architects, and junior civil servants who, if not reformed "in performance," are surely aware of the reform message and better informed of where it is being tested in locations across the land. A loose network of people in various capacities acting as communicators has now been formed who share an urban populist perspective. They do not always agree on means or ideology but in the aggregate, they are slowly



changing the consciousness of Canadians about the problems of cities and the options for solving them in different ways.

## AN ASSESSMENT AND PROGNOSIS

In Canadian cities there exist a number of inter-relationships among different people who share a populist view; there is a continuing transference and exchange in roles; there is now informed communication. After all the sound and fury, what is left? Are cities now better places? Are decisions made more democratically? Is urban government better managed, more effective? Have citizens benefited by movements and organizations? Definitive answers are difficult to supply; we are still too near to and involved in the events to be totally objective. But some tentative conclusions should be possible.

First, there has been a substantial shift in the agenda of political debate and public discussion. Issues of growth, environment, land control, neighborhood, and public transit are now widely debated in a more informed manner. The last decade has seen a number of initiatives taken to meet these issues. The federal government has brought forward a rewritten National Housing Act and, along with MSUA, is tentatively moving toward population and settlement policies. Several provincial governments have considered, or are considering, new planning acts that contain stricter measures for land control and, in some cases, measures to recover some of the profits on land speculation. There is certainly a greater political sensitivity to neighborhood aspirations and urban conservation. The emergence of municipal housing agencies and the introduction of improvement programs that upgrade, not destroy, are significant steps forward.

This is not to say, however, that these forward steps represent fundamental alternatives in policies and programs. Far from it. There is still too much development that is destructive of nature or the built environment and still too many needs go unattended (such as the incidence of poverty and disadvantage in our central

cities). The disparity between the income and life-style of inner-city minorities and those living in the suburbs has accentuated. The major changes occurring in our inner cities, with a much greater variety of people with differing needs, require very different responses in the planning and delivery of fire and police services, in educational and social programs, in housing and renewal—all of which must be fine tuned and decentralized. There must also be economic development programs for inner cities that provide jobs and opportunities where people live. None of these priority issues are being met.<sup>8</sup>

The degree to which these issues will or can be addressed depends in large part on two essential planks in the urban populist platform: the reform of institutions and the redistribution of political power. Here the achievements of the past decade are dubious. The thrust in reform of institutions has been the creation of regional governments that brought increasing centralization of power by civic and provincial administrations and accentuated difficulties for citizen access. Genuine efforts to restructure governments such as to improve access and provide greater accountability are few and far between. In fact city departments have multiplied and grown in size and complexity, and governmental processes have similarly been further wrapped in procedures and regulations.

Local-level councils and neighborhood city halls are virtually nonexistent. The only area where signs of change occur is in the interest shown for freedom of information laws and environmental impact. If properly met, these requirements could open up the political system and break down the monopoly of information that constitutes a significant power base for governments.

What of the shift in power relationships within cities? One of the unifying attitudes of urban populists was their opposition to the domination of city politics by economic and social elites and the property industry. In the face of these, most urban residents were relatively powerless. Since the early 1970s, two counter-trends have emerged. One is the number of new groups and organizations that represent the



disadvantaged—groups that have a community base. A second is organizations that manage their own housing, credit, or health services. One might expect that they too have altered the decision-making process to some degree. But such groups are still struggling. Funds are hard to obtain, and there is a retrenchment in government support. The original community organizers who provided much of the stimulus have become authors or have retreated to the corridors of academia, and there does not appear to be a new generation to take their place. Furthermore, such groups never made the breakthrough of establishing a real power bloc that could substantially alter the locus of decision making. The idea of creating many broad-based community organizations, like that of Riverdale, has not come to fruition. The classical notion that the “representative elected-administrative” system makes the decisions while communities play the role of pressure groups is still paramount.

In trying to assess the missed opportunities or failures, we might postulate that as urban reform politics grew out of community power movements, it did not carry with it goals for changing the nature of decision making. Elected reformers would fight to oppose developments and support citizen protestations or advocacies, but rarely did they make striking efforts to dismantle the conventional system of hierarchal, top-down decision making. In this respect, the achievement of urban reform politics has been almost nil. Reformers challenged traditional ethics, outlooks, and practices, and they did make city government more responsive to contemporary issues, but governments and bureaucracies are still making decisions for people. One has to conclude that there has not been a major change in the power relationships for urban society because the institutions through which those relationships work have not been subjected to meaningful reform.

Is this a failure of the goals and ambitions of those who dreamed of a new order, of participation by people at the local level? Not necessarily. In this first decade, a number of preconditions for major changes in our political system had to be met: there had to be a challenge to entrenched ideas; there had to be the emergence

of activists and thinkers who could demonstrate in thought and deed the contradictions between the precepts of democratic theory and what really existed in contemporary urban society; there had to be the entrance of new people into the political arena.

We are now at the stage where established paradigms are being revealed.<sup>9</sup> What now awaits is the creation of a new paradigm, the framework of a new system of ideas, institutions, and activities to govern urban areas and plan their development. The rough-hewn ideas about participation, community control, decentralization, and government accountability must be set out in workable, operational terms. They must become part of a new political agenda. The rhetoric must now translate into proposals about how a new system will work, how it is to be implemented, how much it will cost. The romantic ideals of the mid-1960s should become working models for the 1970s and 1980s. And these working models should then become central to the reform initiative. This is where the work of researchers, communicators, planners, designers, and social innovators of all ilk becomes important. From these must come the outline for a new system, prescribed in both theoretical and practical terms. Just as John Maynard Keynes revolutionized economic thought and practice in the 1930s, so must there now be a similarly dramatic alternative to government and politics that responds to the hard urban-environmental realities of today and the harder reality of tomorrow. The imponderable is whether there will now emerge a new generation of urbanist activists, thinkers, and politicians to carry through.

## NOTES

1. In July 1968 Paul Hellyer, the newly appointed minister of housing, was authorized by the cabinet to establish a task force on housing and urban development. Members of the task force comprised three well-known Canadian academicians, a mortgage investment expert, a house-builder and developer, and an architect, with Hellyer himself serving as chairman.



2. For an important statement of this philosophy, see Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
3. For more detailed examination, see L. Axworthy and D. Epstein, "Public Policy and Urban Neighbourhood," *Canadian Issues* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1975).
4. For an example of the illusory sense of participation, a personal experience was the National Committee for Habitat. For committee comments, see *Habitat and Canadians: The Report of the Canadian National Committee* (January 1976).
5. The most famous is Daniel Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1969).
6. Don Keating, the executive director of Riverdale, has written an illuminating account of this experience. See Keating, 1975.
7. See chapter 20 for Nancy Cooley's account of stakes and self-help in Vancouver's Britannia project.
8. For an examination of some of these needs and how they constitute a need for basic change in planning and delivery of city services, see Lloyd Axworthy and Pat Christie, *Winnipeg's Core Area: An Assessment of Conditions Affecting Law Enforcement* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, October 1975).
9. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), for

a discussion of changing paradigms and the necessary stage of revelation.

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